Student Engagement Strategy 2015-19

Vision:

To develop and implement an environment that delivers outstanding learning and an exceptional university experience, co-created by actively engaged students and staff.

Introduction

This strategy aims to further enhance the continued development of a strong student engagement at all levels and in all areas of the university, ensuring all in our organisation are involved. The principle of student engagement and representation is strategically, morally and ethically significant to Leeds Trinity University and contributes to a broad range of activity including the quality of our academic provision.

Indeed in the strategic goal to 'Consolidate Leeds Trinity University's position as a provider of outstanding education, developed and delivered in partnership with our students, business and industry, led by research and advanced practice' the University makes it a priority to 'Enable students to engage meaningfully with the University and its decision making processes'.

This document outlines a strategy, within which we aim to reach the following objectives, the specifics of which are detailed further within this paper:

- To further embed a culture and ethos of student engagement which may be achieved by continual improvement of student voice activities and mechanisms throughout Leeds Trinity University;
- Enhance the existing practice of student and staff partnership working and problem solving to enhance the student experience and support the university in meeting its strategic aims;
- Learning from best practice within and outside of the University;
- An increase in activities enabling student engagement in quality assurance and enhancement;
- Strengthening of the existing partnership between the University and the Leeds Trinity University Students' Union (LTSU);
- Support LTSU in becoming recognised for outstanding representation activities;
- To increase engagement from student groups who are often viewed as hard to reach such as mature, part-time, international students, distance learners and students with disabilities;
- To empower students as learners, co-creators and partners in all aspects of the University's work including curriculum design, delivery and assessment; and
- An annual increase in overall satisfaction in the National Student Survey and the Student Experience Survey.

Rationale

The enhancement of the University's ability to engage students in influencing university activity has been a key priority in recent years. The steps taken include, inter alia: redesigning the deliberative structures to increase student representation, introducing a Student Engagement and Experience Committee as one of the four Sub-Committees of Academic Board; working

with Leeds Trinity Students' Union (LTSU) to enable them to better train more student representatives; increasing the number of opportunities for 'informal' student contributions; regular Executive contact with LTSU Officers and staff; University commitment to Student Voice Week; extensive consultations with students about the strategic plan and key institutional strategies (e.g. estate, learning, teaching and assessment; student panels involved in interview process for senior staff; LTSU President is a member of the Senior Management Group; and the involvement of students in task and finish groups). The aim of the strategic plan is to further build on this work and foster a greater understanding of what 'student engagement' means at the University.

The concept of student engagement has gained considerable momentum throughout the sector over the last few years and the emphasis on its importance is only strengthened by the publication of the Student Engagement chapter B5 in the Quality Assurance Agency's Quality Code.

Large bodies of research have been conducted at universities across the world concerning different facets of student engagement in higher education. As noted in a paper by Kerri-Lee Krause for the University of Melbourne;

'Engagement has become a pivotal focus of attention as institutions locate themselves in an increasingly marketised and competitive higher education environment. Meanwhile, the quality assurance mandate has drawn attention to the need for universities to demonstrate that they add value and enhance the quality of the student experience through monitoring and evaluation cycles of continuous improvement.'

At Leeds Trinity University we recognise that the HE sector is changing rapidly but instead of viewing our students as passive consumers of their education, we value them as partners and aim to support them as informed participants in their learning. Ultimately, this strategy is designed to be the structure which outlines the activities enabling us to meet that aim.

Structure

This strategy is divided into six key themes which will deliver related initiatives through to 2019 to meet the objectives outlined above. The initiatives outlined so far are not exhaustive and this strategy is designed to allow flexibility. The remainder of this document relays the key points of the themes and following that, the detail and any appropriate key performance indicators.

What do we mean by Student Engagement?

Throughout this document and of course in the title, we use the phrase 'Student Engagement' frequently and it continues to be in the spotlight across the Higher Education Sector.

For the strategy to be of any tangible use to us at Leeds Trinity University, we need to know what we mean by student engagement in this context.

Student engagement can mean many things to many people; attendance, involvement, teaching, conversations. But in this context, **we mean the active and informed participation of students in shaping and developing their student experience.**

This could take a number of forms; students could be representatives of their cohort, be members of panels, leaders of change projects or co-organisers of events or problem solving projects with staff. The goals of this strategy are to outline the aim to continue to embed a culture and ethos of student engagement throughout the University.

Theme One:
Student Voice and Representation

Objective

Achieve continual improvement of student voice activities and mechanisms throughout the university.

Background

Theme one focuses entirely on student voice and representation that is delivered by the Student Representative System. The system is owned by the Students' Union but facilitated in partnership with the Academic Standards Office and exists to ensure that the student voice is central to our activities throughout the University. It is crucial that we keep developing and improving the system to ensure that all students have the opportunity to engage and are fairly represented. This theme is about continuing to develop and support a robust system of student representation in partnership with the students' union, using the ideas and initiatives outlined in the brief summary above.

Students will continue to be valued members on various committees across the University but we want to ensure that they're engaged as active participants and not just observers. We want to increase the amount of support they receive to ensure they can confidently participate and we want to ensure our staff are equally supported to take part in student engagement activity. These areas are covered elsewhere in the themes but training programmes are important here. Improving and increasing attendance at training sessions for both students and staff is key to developing our student representation system.

We will also need to consider that closing the feedback loop must become part of our practice throughout our student engagement activities. Students have many opportunities to feedback about their programmes, campus and university experience, but the university must become more adept at communicating response, change and outcomes to our students and staff.

Actions

Strengthen partnership working between the university and Students' Union, working on key initiatives that can impact on the student experience.
Increase training opportunities for both staff and students on student engagement – increase the number trained.
To continue to work in partnership with the Students' Union to develop an effective system of course representatives and to provide sufficient resources for such work to be developed.
Enhance the training for student representatives.
Work with LTSU to focus on enhancement and how the student representative system could be more effective.
Develop a communications plan to enhance the communications with student representatives and students.

Academic Quality and Standards Office to support the Student Representative training events through the year.
Continue to support in partnership with LTSU and promote Student Voice events including Voice Week, surveys and other events.
Continue with the Vice-Chancellor's Certificate of Student Representation (VCCSR) and the Student Academic Representative (STAR) awards.
Develop and implement a campaign to demonstrate how the University responds to student feedback at all levels.
Extend pre-meeting surgeries for the LTC and SEEC to all committees.
Student Experience and Engagement Committee to review the student charter on a two year basis.

Theme Two:
Supporting Staff Participation in Student Engagement

Objective

An increase in staff participation in student engagement.

Background

Theme two looks at the necessity of staff participation in supporting student engagement and student voice. We recognise that students, quite rightly, will usually respond best to staff members they see regularly and have built close relationships with. They are more likely to approach them with problems and would be more inclined to work with them to solve those problems. Student Engagement is a lot more difficult to encourage without staff engagement. This theme aims to develop support mechanisms for staff, increase training opportunities in areas concerning student engagement and to facilitate partnership working with students.

It is important to us that staff feel confident and knowledgeable in supporting the student voice and that they are encouraged to bring the student engagement ethos into their everyday practice. Staff will be encouraged to consider how the student voice affects their area of work.

It is important that all areas of the university start to embed student engagement as part and parcel of what they do. Students identify strongly with their area of academic study, most likely because that's the reason they chose Leeds Trinity University, so it is crucial that we support academic staff in student engagement activities and enable them to embrace those activities in their everyday practice.

Actions

Development of a training programme for staff to include maximising the impact of the student voice on committees.
Facilitate the publicising of actions/responses to student feedback at an institutional level through a feedback campaign.
Support the Yorkshire University's Small and Specialist Group student led awards.
Work with Yorkshire University's Small and Specialist Group to share good practice in student voice activities and staff development.
Programme leaders to have regular meetings with students (with a particular focus at the start of each academic year on listening and providing responses to comments made in student surveys.
Heads of Departments to visit class sessions thus allowing students to air concerns so that issues raised can be resolved quickly and informally.
Supporting staff to facilitate regular discussion groups with students.
To involve students in the planning and delivery of their academic provision.

Theme Three:
Student Engagement in Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement

Objective

An increase in activities enabling student engagement in quality assurance and enhancement to support the development and delivery of outstanding learning.

Background

This theme aims to support the university in going further than focus groups and discussion. This theme is about engaging students as active and informed participants in academic quality assurance and enhancement and enabling students to have a key stake in shaping their academic experience. This theme will also support student engagement for the purpose of shaping the direction of future provision through periodic review, validation and programme approval.

Over the span of this strategy, it is the intention that we will see an increase in students who understand the work of quality assurance processes within the university. Any students who take part in these activities will be trained and valued as informed members of all and any panel.

For the successful implementation of this theme, we are focussing on a number of key initiatives including, the recruitment of a 'pool' of trained students to take part in quality assurance processes, the development and delivery of training in partnership with the Students' Union, a drive to increase response rates to module evaluation (through the use of Evasys) and to engage the student body with external examiners and their reports, undertaken by the Academic Registry.

Actions

Recruitment of a pool of students who are trained to participate in various quality assurance and enhancement activities.
Development of a training programme for students and provision of support to staff to encourage maximum engagement by students.
Continue to embed student member's involvement in curriculum design, programme approval, and periodic review panels.
Continue to work in partnership with the student body to ensure that communication around courses, regulations, support and opportunities available to students is clear and prompt. This should include, but not be limited to, the changes to the intranet and external website that are already planned.
Increase the response rates to module evaluation questionnaires (MEQs) and enhance the evaluation of MEQs. Ambitious targets have been set for both module coverage (100%) and an 80% completion rate per module.
Ensure a prompt and clear response to issues raised via MEQ's.

Theme Four:
Non-Academic Student Engagement

Objective

An increase in student and staff partnership working and problem solving across all areas of the university to enhance the student experience and support the University in meeting its strategic aims.

Background

At Leeds Trinity University, it is important to us that the ethos of student engagement reaches every corner of the university. Student Engagement in itself can mean many different things, and in Higher Education it is often referred to in the context of student representation and academic discussion. This theme will support and develop student engagement in non-academic areas and will work with professional services across the University to implement ways of working that consider and actively participate with students to make positive change.

Through this theme we want to support our professional services in embracing and embedding student engagement as part of their day to day practice. Each member of staff has an impact on the student experience, so it is important that we take this work forward with our enthusiasm for higher education, to make the Leeds Trinity University student experience the best it can be.

Thorough analysis of the results of our annual student surveys will provide the impetus for this work. The National Student Survey and the Student Experience Survey are our yearly opportunity to invite all students to feedback on their experience, including the non-academic aspects of university life. It is important that we not only put this data to good use but we share with students and staff how it is being used by publicising actions, success and best practice. We recognise that we need to continually improve our response and satisfaction rates and so each year; the University will develop a survey action plan to ensure surveys promotion and delivery is focussed, well-co-ordinated and that all in the university receive relevant and timely information on the subject.

Each department and professional service will be responsible for developing and delivering an action plan to imbed student engagement, but this will be supported by the university and the Students' Union. Professional services will involve students in the design and delivery of University services.

The University will support professional services in developing initiatives and prompting dialogue with students. We will support colleagues in recognising how they can encourage student engagement especially where at present, they rarely interact physically with students.

Actions

Develop annual departmental plans within professional services to consider student engagement throughout their activity.
Develop action plans focussed on student surveys.
Encourage regular meetings between support service staff and students to promote dialogue ad engagement in the day to day operation and strategic development of the services.
Develop and implement a focused survey plan each year resulting in increased response and satisfaction rates in student surveys. This should avoid over-surveying.
Provide a series of events that occur before the survey season to promote completion and understanding of the surveys.
Further develop mechanisms and analysis of survey data collected to show year-on-year patterns and other salient patterns.
Outsource catering to improve offer and service including opening time and range.
Increase the provision of social learning space around the campus.
Develop a student experience strategy to complement this strategy.

Theme Five:
Breaking Down Barriers to Student Engagement

Objective

To increase engagement from student groups who are often viewed as hard to reach.

Background

It is of huge importance to us that all students, regardless of their background, mode of study, abilities or personal circumstances, are given the opportunity to shape their time at Leeds Trinity University. For us, Student Engagement refers to all of our students, and so this theme aims to break down any barriers and encourage engagement from traditionally 'hard to reach' groups. In fact, 'hard to reach' is a misleading phrase as it presumes that the nature of some groups of students make it difficult for us to engage with them; actually, we should mould our approach to suit the needs of our students to enable them to be as active and informed as possible. The work of this theme aims to do just that. We shall work to support the engagement of **international**, **part-time**, **mature students**, **masters students, foundation students off campus** and **students with disabilities** by developing initiatives that suit their needs.

We will work closely with the Students' Union to widen participation in the shaping of the student experience across all of the other themes covered in this document. We shall ensure that all training events and opportunities are accessible and that we consider accessibility when designing activities. We will investigate online resources and virtual meetings so that those who cannot attend on campus meetings and events can be engaged regardless. This work will begin to break down engagement barriers and we aim to continually support this and similar developments.

Actions

To work with the Students' Union in supporting inclusivity in all their activities.
To work with the Equality and Diversity Committee to ensure that students with protected characteristics have as much opportunity to be engaged as other students.
To develop new ways to engage with PGCE students who may not be on campus (e.g. online resources and virtual meetings).

Theme Six:
Student as Co-creators

Objective

To empower students as learners, co-creators and partners.

Background

Our final theme of the strategy will look to empower students as co-creators of their university experience and will allow the University to look at student engagement with aspiration and facilitate student and staff partnerships in a new way. This theme is about supporting partnership and problem solving led by students and staff and to enable students to direct areas of improvement throughout the university. This theme will ensure that students can approach the university; that they will be supported in the development of their ideas; and it will enable them to engage with the appropriate staff positively and professionally.

Whilst working within this theme, staff will aim to deliver workshops on topical issues (i.e. student engagement) to staff, whilst involving students. We will use embedded events such as learning and teaching days to engage with staff and promote partnership working. Whilst we will carefully consider the relationship between this work stream and that of theme one, the initiatives present here may also give opportunities for engagement to traditionally 'non-engaged' students, empowering them to lead change and co-create their student experience. These form an integral part of the Teaching and Learning and Assessment Strategy and are discussed more fully in that document.

Actions

Include actions on "students as co-creators" as part of Department action plans.
Provide opportunities for students to become co-creators of their own education and empowering them to lead change.
Encourage/develop mechanisms for students and staff to develop solutions in partnership.
To support collaboration projects between students and staff by providing mediation, facilitation and signposting.
Deliver awareness through staff development sessions of topical issues relating to students.
Build a bank of good practice where students and staff have worked together to solve a problem.
To promote and encourage the development of big and small ideas from students in partnership with staff.
To provide opportunities for 'non-engaged' students to be involved in shaping and developing their university experience.
Consider the creation of a University wide SSAC to link Themes 1 and 6.

Monitoring, Measuring and Evaluation

Whilst this strategy will sit underneath the main University strategic plan, the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation will be the responsibility of the Student Experience and Engagement Committee who will receive regular updates on progress.

The Key Performance indicators for this strategy include:

- Exceed our national benchmark for overall student satisfaction in the National Student Survey by 2014/15; achieve 90% by 2015/16 and be in the top quartile by 2019.
- Increased year on year scores in the internal student experience survey.
- Increased number of students receiving training as student representatives.
- Improved attendance rates at Departmental and University Committees (to be 80% by 2019).